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ABSTRACT

Students in grades 4, 5, or 6 can learn to write more concretely, accurately, and deliberately by employing three strategies: (1) elimination of those words or phrases that garble meaning or repeat unnecessarily; (2) substitution of more specific, concrete, and generally more appropriate expressions for ones that are vague and unimaginative; and (3) addition of words, phrases, and clauses to a sentence to improve the focus on an image or an impression in writing and the texture of the sentence. To motivate the students toward "elimination," the teacher can ask them to distinguish between sets of sentences, to feed back information to the writer, and to listen to their own written expressions via tape recordings. "Substitution" can be approached through improving the focus in the subject and verb parts of sentences, listing substitution choices for given expressions, and distinguishing between good and weak comparisons. "Addition" can be accomplished in the fourth grade by reducing and combining sentences, in the fifth grade by converting simple sentences to clauses modifiers, and in the sixth grade by adding to pre- and post-modifying slots. (HS)

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THREE STRATEGIES FOR REVISING SENTENCES

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Three Strategies For Revising Sentences

Grades 4-5-6

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Editor

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Here we go around the mulberry bush with questions like "Should pupils in grades 4-5-6 be expected to revise their papers? Isn't it better just to let the kids write and not worry about sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and so on?"

Answering the above questions, I might steal from Cicero: "I criticize by creation, not by finding fault." Rather profound. But misleading if it suggests that "finding fault" is analogous to "revising." Revision can be one important stage in the process of composing—if the teacher does more than have her pupils proofread for mechanical errors. Revision can be creative acts of describing, ordering, and selecting. In this paper I wish to share some techniques for teaching revision as a creative process. Teaching aims in both composition and language are integrated in my approaches, allowing for a heuristic method of language learning—rather than a rule-governed. For the most part, the techniques are easily adaptable. But I feel sure that they can be improved by the teacher who tries them out.

THREE STRATEGIES FOR REVISING SENTENCES

To improve his craft in writing, the pupil in grade four, five, or six can do more than work with mechanics of spelling, grammar, usage, punctuation, and capitalization. He can begin formulating definite strategies that will help him to write more concretely, more accurately, and more deliberately. *Rhetorical improvement*, not error correction, is the subject of this paper.

In working with fourth, fifth, and sixth grade pupils in the West Lafayette Community Schools, I presented three strategies that pupils could use in revising their sentences:

1. *Elimination* of those words or phrases that garble meaning or repeat unnecessarily.
2. *Substitution* of more specific, more concrete, and generally more appropriate expressions for ones that are vague and unimaginative.
3. *Addition* of words, phrases and clauses to a sentence, in order to improve (a) the focus on an image or an impression in writing, and (b) the texture of the sentence. (I mean *texture* here in the sense that Francis Christenson uses it in "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence," *College Composition And Communication*, October 1963:

> Texture provides a descriptive or evaluative term. If a writer adds to a few of his nouns or verbs or main clauses and adds little, the texture may be said to be thin. The style will be plain or bare . . . But if he adds frequently or much or both, then the texture may be said to be dense or rich.

1. *Discovering What Needs To Be Eliminated*

Most elementary teachers will say that young pupils need to learn how to *add* to their writing. True. But I also believe that too often pupils write garbled utterances, redundant words and phrases, and irrelevant statements that prevent them from seeing a way to lucid and interesting communication. Frequently young writers need to use the pruning shears. Below are samples of the types of student writings which need ***elimination.***

Sample A: The Garbled Statement

The word "garbled" is used here in the sense that Hunt (1965), and O'Donnell, Griffin, and Norris (1967) used it in their reports on syntax: " . . . a tangle of words which can not be understood." The writing below is what I would call a "garbled statement." It is an excerpt written by a fourth grader who was asked to tell in one paragraph how he would determine the candy needs for Halloweeners if he were a parent. Evidently this pupil did not hear himself write.

DECIDE HOW MANY KIDS ARE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND BIGGER KIDS FROM OTHER NEIGHBORHOODS.

Sample B: Unnecessary Repetition

Repetition may be an effective stylistic device. However, too often the elementary pupil repeats words, phrases, and ideas unintentionally and ineffectively:

THE DRIP OF RAIN MADE A CONTINUOUS DRIPPING SOUND.

Very likely the reason for much of the unnecessary repetition in young people's writing is due to the pupil losing the sound and structure of his expression, as Vygotsky observes in *Thought and Language* (1962, M.I.T. Press).[1] The frequent and unnecessary repetition of *and, so,* and *then* is another problem of fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. Too often the result: a stringy style. Why do the young writers overuse *and, so,* and *then*? Kellogg Hunt's study on *Grammatical Structures Written at Three Grade Levels* cited the young, linguistically immature fourth grade pupil as having a relatively narrow grammatical span of techniques for combining sentences. For example, too often the young pupil misses opportunities for combining sentences with relative clauses. He tends to write sentences like this—"There was a lady next door and the lady was a singer"; whereas the older pupil, using more sophisticated techniques for combining, might write the sentence—"The lady who lives next door is a singer."

Sample C: The Irrelevant Statement

Trying to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant statements is a sophisticated task, for the pupil must (a) realize a type of syntax between the statements and (b) question his own motives

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[1]For applications of Vygotsky's theories in teaching composition to ninth graders, see Stuart Sheeley's *Concept Guide for the Oral-Aural-Visual Program for Teaching Language Arts*, 1968, USOE Grant No. 67-03188-1, Indianapolis Public Schools.

for including the statements. With the latter, he may be hampered by the "sound" of his writing: As Kenneth Burke warns in *A Grammar of Motives*—"The most clear-sounding of words can thus be used for the vaguest reference, quite as we speak of a 'certain thing,' when we have no particular thing in mind." The *italicized* sentence in the paragraph below illustrates a type of innocent insincerity too often found in young pupils' writings.

> WHEN I WENT TO CHURCH, I SAW JOHN SINGING IN THE CHOIR. *HE WAS SINGING IN A PLEASANT VOICE.* HE WAS SINGING WITH FIFTEEN OTHER BOYS.

In question here is the motive of the pupil writing this sentence. Was this sentence really important to include? If it was important, how could the writer distinguish John's voice as being pleasant, when John was singing with fifteen other boys? And why did the writer want to say that John's voice was pleasant?

In getting pupils to use "elimination" as a way of thinking through a revision, I have used several approaches which seemed to work.

1.1 *Asking The Pupils To Distinguish Between Sets Of Sentences:*

While teaching a fourth grade class, I tried to set up conditions that would allow for discovery and a good exchange in a teacher-pupil dialogue. First I used an overhead to project the following sets of sentences from pupils' writings.

Set A I am a football. I get kicked around. People jump on me. I get kicked. I get kicked through poles.

Set B . . . Right now I am looking for food. I am on top of a building. I am looking down the street. . . .

Set C The airport is a noisy place. There are hundreds of thousands of people crowding the halls. . . .

Then I said something like this: "Study all sets, A-B-C. You will find the sentences in each set to be clearly written. But two of the sets can be improved if we eliminate something. Can you guess which two sets need 'elimination'? And can you tell what needs to be eliminated?" With these sets, it did not take long for the fourth graders to realize that Sets A and B contain too many "I's." As a class, we then tried to figure out ways to re-write the ideas in Sets A and B.

1.2 *Asking The Readers To Feedback Information To The Writers:*

In another fourth grade class, I asked the pupils to exchange their first drafts with other members in the class and to feedback information about garbled or irrelevant expressions. The "readers" were asked to identify which ideas of the writers were not coming through clearly. The objective of the "writers": *To eliminate unclear writing.* Here is a copy of the instructions I gave to the class.

Steps in Revising Yesterday's Paragraphs:

1. Read at least two other paragraphs by students in your group.
2. On the other students' papers, write *feedback* questions that might help the writers to clearly say what they want to say.
3. After other students return your paper, do the following:
   (a) Study the *feedback* questions — for example, note which questions suggest that you (1) cross out, (2) re-word, or (3) add to clarify the meaning in your paragraph.
   (b) Re-write your paragraph with the necessary changes.
   (c) Turn in both copies of your paragraph before the end of the hour.

Below is a sample of a fourth grader's response to this approach.

First Draft:

Next time I go on a canoe trip I am going to plan it this way. I would put the supplies in the middle my dad in front my brother or I in the back. My mom closer to the back than in the front and my littlest brother in front of my mom. We would take down to the Wabash on top of the car.

Feedback Questions from Pupils:

What kinds of supplies are you going to take? Where are you going to get them?

Are you going to put yourself in the back? How can you do that? Where are your brothers and your mom sitting?

Is your family sitting on top of the car?

Second Draft:

Next time I go on a canoe trip down the Wabash I am going to balance the canoe this way. First I would put the fishing supplies and food in the middle. My dad would sit in the front and my brothers or I would be in the back. My mom and littlest brother would be in the middle with the supplies.

1.3 *Asking the Pupils to Listen to Their Written Expression*:

In some classes I used tape recorders for independent pupil work in composition. I usually borrow two tape recorders, set them up in the corner of the room, instruct pupils on the operations of the equipment, and then tell the class that, with some of the assignments, I will ask certain pupils to tape their first drafts, listen to them two or three times, making any eliminations, substitutions, or changes which are necessary. What I am hoping for is this: I want the pupils to develop sensitivity to the fluency of their expressions. By a type of independent work with the tape recorder, I

hope that they will discover where the writing sounds "jerky" or "garbled," or "monotonous."

Some of the most intensive studies on the use of the tape recorder in teaching composition have been completed here in Indiana, especially Dr. Anthony Tovatt's USOE research project entitled *Oral-Aural-Visual Stimuli in Teaching Composition to Ninth Grade Students* (1967). The technique of having the students "talk out" their compositions on tapes and then modify the structure of their writing demonstrated " . . . a general superiority over a conventional approach in increasing student abilities in writing, reading, listening, and language usage."[2] And in August 1968, Stuart Sheeley, Supervisor of an OAV, Title III follow-up field test in five Indianapolis Schools, published a two volume guide of materials using Tovatt's approaches. In September 1968, Dr. O. A. Mattai of MacNeill Learning Center at Bowling Green, Kentucky, began adapting many of the OAV materials for elementary use.

Teaching how to eliminate garbled, redundant, and irrelevant expressions is an initial step in preparing pupils for more sophisticated strategies in writing. The writer must have "workable" communicative units if he is to substitute for parts or expand parts of his sentences.

2. *Discovering What Needs to Be Substituted*

The second strategy is that of substituting more specific, more concrete, and generally more appropriate expressions for ones that are vague and unimaginative. This strategy emphasizes the conscious act of accepting or rejecting words in a given sentence, and the conscious act of considering alternative choices for the rejections.

The following samples from papers written by fourth, fifth, and sixth grade pupils illustrate some types of expressions which call for "substitution."

Sample A: Like an antelope he *ran* through the forest. There is certainly nothing wrong with the use of *ran* here; the sixth grader who wrote this sentence suggested the movement rather descriptively with his choice of "Like an antelope." However, a substitution of the word "darted" for "ran" allows the writer to communicate in more specific terms. Words like *run, say, laugh,* and *see* are general in meaning and can be replaced easily with more precise choices. For example, the word *said,* which is frequently overworked in young pupils' writings, can be replaced by *whispered, mumbled, shouted, exclaimed, boasted, retorted, answered, asked, pleaded, encouraged, yelled,* and so forth.

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[2]See the March 1965 issue of the *English Journal* for a summary of Tovatt's oral-aural-visual approaches to teaching composition.

Sample B: This is one of the *stupidest* books I have read. The writer of this sentence is certainly clear in making his feelings known, but perhaps he is too clear. I guess the appropriateness of the term "stupidest" would be determined by the kind of writing the pupil was doing: If this sentence was in a personal communique to another buddy or, perhaps, even to the teacher, the usage might be appropriate, but if the sentence was part of a sincere comment to be shared by anyone interested in reading the book referred to, the use of "stupidest" might be rather irresponsible, unless substantiated by cited evidence.

Sample C: Snow is falling outside. The clouds are as *gray as a dimly lighted room.*

Such an inaccurate comparison also calls for substitutions. Another sixth grade pupil, who wrote on the same topic, made this imaginative simile: "The sun looks like a dim flashlight behind tightly woven black cloth."

In getting pupils to improve the focus of description by consciously substituting words, I have even gone to the extent of putting a sentence on the board and asking the class to indicate, with a "yes" or "no" response, which words needed substitution. Then I would go back to all the "no" responses and ask for alternative choices that would fit into the same grammatical slot. The results were usually good, but the technique seemed too methodical. I don't know the best way to get pupils to substitute in revision. My guess is that the best approach can be determined by the type of written assignment and the types of problems of diction found in the pupils' writings. This means, of course, that the teacher—not a textbook or a curriculum guide—has to be the diagnostician of language needs. After having studied descriptive writings from three classes, I found myself approaching the strategy of substitution in three different ways.

2.1 *Improving the Focus in the Subject and the Verb Parts of Sentences:*

Through the use of transparencies or ditoed materials, I had the class examine pupils' sentences to determine which words should be replaced. In one fifth grade class, I used this paragraph on an overhead:

> I was all alone one night. Both of my parents were gone to P.T.A. meetings, and I was sitting home reading to myself. A dog was making some noises and I heard the trees swaying. When I looked out the window, I was happy to notice my parents' car in the driveway.

Our class discussion went something like this.

T: As you read through this paragraph, ask yourself "What feeling is the writer trying to communicate to me?"

O.K., Mary. What feeling do you think the writer wanted you to feel?

P: That she felt lonely and afraid.

T: Good. Can you pick out some words that suggest a feeling of loneliness?

P: *Alone, night, my parents were gone, I was happy to notice my parents' car.*

T: Good. Now which words tell you that the writer wanted to communicate fear?

P: *Frightening, a dog was making some noises, trees swaying.*

T: O.K. Can you tell me which of these expressions might be re-written with more specific information?

P: *A dog was making some noises*: You can tell what kind of dog it was.

T: That's a good suggestion. Let's look at that part of the sentence and think in terms of substituting words. That's really another way we can be more specific—by using more precise words.

Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to write the sentence in two parts. Let's take one part at a time to see if we can substitute expressions that are more specific than the one we already have. Remember, we want this to sound frightening.

(On the overhead I wrote the two parts of the sentence:
A DOG WAS MAKING SOME NOISES.)

Now, what substitutions can we make for the first part, A DOG?

P: A HOUND.

P: A COLLIE.

P: MY NEIGHBOR'S GERMAN SHEPHERD.

P: THE GREAT DANE NEXT DOOR.

P: A BULLDOG.

T: Good! Now let's look at the second part of the sentence, to see what substitutions can be made: WAS MAKING NOISES.

P: BARKED CONSTANTLY.

P: GROWLED AT THE SHADOWS.

P: HOWLED TO THE MOON.

P: YELPED LIKE HE WAS BEING KILLED.

T: Very good! Now from the suggestions that have been given for substitutions in both parts, select the expressions which you think are best and write them in one good sentence.

After the pupils wrote their revisions, they read them aloud to the class. Encouragement and praise were given — really the best kind of

motivation for writing. This approach to "substitution" seemed to be very appropriate for imaginative writing; however, a more careful approach might be necessary in revising expository prose.

2.2 *Listing Substitution Choices for Given Expressions*:

With fourth grade pupils, who usually need more directions for working with the strategy of substitution, I have used a deductive approach. In one class I dittoed copies of pupils' sentences and designated where on the dittoed material I wanted the class to make the substitutions. I found this an easy way to get pupils to make substitutions for overworked expressions such as *a lot of, talked, said, pretty, nice*, and so on. Below is a sample of the type of pass-out I used with fourth graders.

Instructions: Examine the three sentences below. For each expression in the parentheses substitute three more specific expressions.

1. Like an antelope he (ran) through the forest.

_____

_____

_____

2. Mary is a (nice) girl.

_____

_____

_____

3. I wish I was outside playing instead of (doing the same thing) over and over again.

_____

_____

_____

After the pupils listed their choices for substitutions, I asked them to cross out the poorest substitutions and to re-write the sentences with the one substitution they liked best.

2.3 *Distinguishing between Good and Weak Comparisons:*

In one sixth grade class, I used a more sophisticated approach to "substitution" by having the pupils examine sets of similes to determine which one out of three needed revision. In the original assignment, I asked the pupils to write a three-sentence paragraph about the weather. The first sentence was to contain a general statement about the kind of weather being described. The second sentence was to be a simile in which one particular aspect of a weather condition was to be compared to something else. The third sentence was to do two things: (a) directly indicate the writer's personal feelings about the weather, and (b) place the writer in the classroom. For the most part, the class did the assignment well — though some pupils had problems in writing effective similes. After discovering the problems, I arranged paragraphs for the class to study. I wanted the class to discover which similes were well written and which were not. I guess you can say that I stacked the deck. Below are the paragraphs that I used on the overhead.

Paragraph A:

The sky is dark and stormy. The sun looks like a dim flashlight behind tightly woven black cloth. I am glad I'm inside away from the storm.

Pupil's Rating

Good

Paragraph B:

The day looks dark and lonely. The clouds look like a broom sweeping stars about. Oh how I wish I was out.

Pupil's Rating

Fair: Stars are not visible in day time. Simile should be changed. Last sentence should tell where pupil is.

Paragraph C:

This afternoon is drab. The sun is peeping in and out of the clouds like a small child playing hide-and-seek. I'm sitting at my desk in school and the sun just disappeared behind the clouds.

Pupil's Rating

Good

After the class rated two more sets of paragraphs, I gave time for some pupils to re-examine their own similes.

I obtained the design for the paragraph assignment from Dr. Richard Young's speech on a tagmemic approach in writing, given at the 1966 NCTE Convention in Houston. (For a review of this approach, read A. L. Becker's "A Tagmemic Approach to Paragraph Analysis," *College Composition and Communication*, December, 1965.)

In having my classes work with "substitution" as a strategy in revision, I tried to motivate pupils to begin consciously working with choices in writing. As Hans Guth puts it in *English Today and Tomorrow*: "The art of writing is the art of making up one's mind." (p. 449)

3. *Discovering Ways to Add to the Sentence*

To help pupils improve the texture of their sentences, I presented a third strategy: Addition. When pupils first begin writing sentences — usually in first grade — the texture of their sentences tends to be very thin — almost threadbare. Then as they become more perceptive about language and the world around them, they intuitively acquire a know-how for writing more syntactically mature sentences. But as reported in the studies by Loban (1963), Hunt (1965), and O'Donnell (1967), the pupils' growth in acquiring syntactic insights into the writing language is slow. So it is no surprise for a teacher to find fourth or fifth grade writing styles that look something like this:

> I'm in a helicopter. I see so many cars below. I'm flying over a river. I see a big boat. Look at that big plane . . .

An older writer — let's say one who is at least a high school senior — might express the same ideas like this:

> As I fly in a helicopter over a river, I can see below me a large tanker moving upstream, hundreds of tiny cars waiting for a draw-bridge to be lowered, and a big TWA 707, wheels down, going in for a landing at Miggs Field.

It is very apparent that the high school senior added more detail. But it should also be noted that he used only one main clause, whereas the fourth grade pupil used five main clauses. The difference is not only in the amount of detail added by each writer, but also in his techniques for expanding the main clauses. In traditional grammars these techniques for expansion are referred to as types of modification. In transformational grammar, these techniques might be referred to as "in-put." That is, the added modifiers can be explained as being derived from transformed sentences.[1] For example, in the fourth grader's writing, five main clauses can be counted:

1. *I am in a helicopter.*
2. *I see so many cars below.*
3. *I am flying over a river.*
4. *I see a boat.*
5. *(You) look at that plane.*

---

[1]For a clear and concise explanation of transformational grammar see Owen Thomas's *Transformational Grammar and the Teacher of English*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966.

But the number of modifiers that can be explained in terms of transformed sentences are only two:

#4 I see a boat.

The boat is big.

I see a big boat.

#5 (You) look at that plane.

The plane is big.

(You) *look at that big plane.*

On the other hand, only one main clause can be counted in the older pupil's writing — even though considerably more detail was added. Ten of the added modifiers can be explained as transformed sentences:

Base: *I can see something below me.*[4]

Transformed Sentences:

I fly a helicopter over a river.
A tanker moves downstream.
The tanker is large.
Hundreds of cars look tiny.
The cars wait for something.[4]
Something lowers the drawbridge.[4]
The TWA lands at Miggs Field.
The TWA is big.
The TWA is a 707.
The TWA has its wheels down.

The younger pupil will eventually learn to add more modifiers in writing. Intuitively he *will* acquire a skill for embedding. But as a teacher of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade pupils, I have to ask myself "How can I set up situations where pupils will discover *where to add* and *what to add* at an earlier time than if their growth were merely left to chance?"

Of course, showing pupils good examples of writing and carefully preparing the pupils to think about what they are going to say in writing are two of the best approaches to having the pupils include good detail.

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[4]Adding the PRO form "something" is necessary in making the transformations operable. See Robert Lees' *The Grammar of English Nominalizations*, Indiana University Press, 1966, for rationale.

But the use of good detail does not necessarily preclude good style. And stylistic improvement is the subject of my concern.

In working with the strategy of addition, I varied my approach with the grade level. The lower the grade level, the simpler the approach.

3.1 *Fourth Grade: Reducing and Combining Sentences*

When pupils tend to run together many short simple sentences, I hunt for examples that will illustrate the need for sentence combining. I write the examples on transparencies; and with the aid of an overhead, I flash the sentences on the screen and begin citing some aspect of the writing that is praiseworthy. Then I began asking questions which, I hope, will lead to discovery. For example, in working with a fourth grade class, I projected the following sample:

> . . . I saw a hold-up in the bank. I was looking over the balcony when it happened. And he took $100,500. And then he went to the stadium and he went into a store and took $8,671 and then I got mad. . . .

I then asked the class if they would like to know more about this episode. They all replied affirmatively. "Whoever wrote this paper added enough detail to make this part very exciting," I told them. "The beginning of the story creates a feeling of suspense. The reader wants to go on reading. But, if *you* were the writer of this story, and you planned to revise it because it was going to appear in a collection of short stories, are there any words you would eliminate — because they are used over and over again?"

After the pupils counted the number of "and's" and decided to eliminate some of them, they also cited the unnecessary use of two "I's" (in the first two sentences) and three "he's." This was the foothold I was looking for. Once we began eliminating some of the unnecessary pronouns, we could then begin combining the sentences, but "you will have to figure out a way to combine your sentences differently," I challenged.

It didn't take long before one pupil came up with this possibility: *I looked over the balcony and saw a hold-up in the bank.* Then another pupil surprised me with this one: *Looking over the balcony, I saw a hold-up in the bank.*

I was pleased with the results from the class. I decided to press my luck: "Both of these suggestions for combining are very good. But let's just take one of them to see if we can combine the next sentence with it." With the overhead, I projected the revised sentences, and beneath it I wrote the next sentence from the pupil's paper:

1. - Looking over the balcony, I saw a hold-up in the bank.

2. - And he took $100,500.

"Now with this assignment, I'm going to give you a clue: Can you think of a way to combine these two sentences so that sentence two will come after the word *saw*?"

Two responses came from the class:

. . . . I saw a man hold up the bank for $100,500.

. . . . I saw a thief take $100,500 from a banker.

After we finished with this sentence, I asked the class to examine the results of our ten minutes' work on style:

Original: I saw a hold-up in the bank. I was looking over the balcony when it happened. And he took $100,500. . . .

Revised: Looking over the balcony, I saw a man hold-up the bank for $100,500.

When I visited the class the next day, they seemed eager to have more of the same kind of activity. And I was ready for them. I projected the example below and asked the class if they could tell me what needed to be eliminated:

I'm in a helicopter. I see so many cars below. I'm flying over a river. I see a big boat. Look at that big plane. . .

Almost immediately the pupils responded "There are too many "I's." Then I added, "Well, how might you include all this information with fewer "I's"? In a matter of minutes, we jotted down a number of good suggestions and had completed another brief exercise with the strategy of "addition."

A few days later, after the pupils completed another writing assignment, I underlined sets of their sentences which needed combining and returned the papers. The pupils were given class time to figure out ways to combine the underlined sentences. Usually young pupils do not like to re-write assignments, but I found that almost the whole class had fun doing this type of revision.

3.2 *Fifth Grade: Converting Simple Sentences to Clause Modifiers*

Fifth graders can make some rather astute observations on style, if they are given the chance. In trying to evoke some critical judgments about writing, I projected an average fifth grade paragraph, without any particular observations I wanted the class to make. I was merely interested in finding out what the pupils could see that was good or weak in the paragraph below. Their perceptive comments allowed me to introduce a strategy for adding clause modifiers.

Pupil's Paragraph: I was on a passenger train. Many noises kept me awake. The clinky-clank of the rails, the humming of the engine, the soft mutter of people's voices, and the rush of the wind kept me up all night.

The dialogue that the pupils and I had went something like this.

T: How would you rate this paragraph: Good-fair-poor?

P: Good.

T: Why?

P: Because the person writing this included several separate sounds that bothered him.

T: How would you rate him?

P: Fair.

T: Why? Aren't there several distinct sounds here?

P: Yes, but they all don't go together.

T: In what way?

P: The soft humming of the train and the soft mutter of people's voices don't sound as disturbing as the other noises.

T: Good.

And how would you rate it?

P: Fair.

T: Why?

P: The beginning needs more to it. There's not enough information given and it sounds jerky.

T: Let's examine the beginning. Where does it sound jerky?

P: Well, between the first and second sentence.

T: Perhaps we can smooth that out. (I then wrote the two sentences and several conjunctions on the board.) Consider connecting these two ideas. On the right side, I will list several words which may be used for connecting. Study these words and tell which you feel will work the best in connecting the two sentences.

	Connecting Words
I was on a passenger train	As While
Many noises kept me awake	When After Because And But

P: I think "when" is the best choice.

P: But that doesn't sound right.

T: Why not?

P: It doesn't sound right to say "When I was on a passenger train many noises kept me awake."

T: Why not?

P: Well, in the first sentence you are talking about yourself, and in the second sentence you are talking about noises.

T: Why not talk about yourself in both sentences?

P: You are talking about yourself in both. You have the word "me" in the second sentence.

T: Can you make "I" the subject of the second sentence?

P: You can, but you will have to change the rest of the sentence.

T: Why not change it?

Two of the pupils' revisions read:

When I was trying to sleep on the train, I heard many disturbing sounds.

As I tried sleeping on the train, I heard many sounds that kept me awake.

The addition used in this case was made to an "outside" slot of a single base sentence. I wish to distinguish between this type of modification and the type that I worked with in sixth grade: modification which can be explained as being derived from "embedded" sentences. *Figure 1* illustrates a grammatical difference.[5]

The strategy of "outside addition" allows the pupil to discover sentences that can be combined rather easily; it forces him to make decisions about the logical use of connecting words like *when, because,* and *so;* and it provides a practical approach to the study of syntax—not all the formula stuff.

3.3 *Sixth Grade: Adding to Pre and Post Modifying Slots*

With samples of imaginative descriptive writing, I aimed at getting pupils to develop more concrete images by adding single word or phrase

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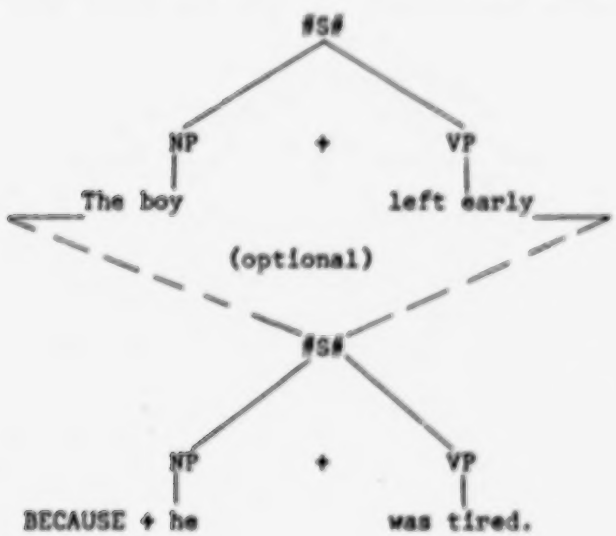
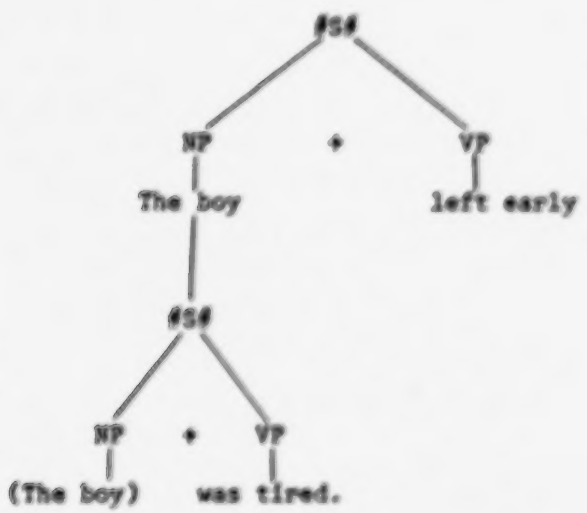
[5]For further discussion on syntactic differences between adjunct clausal modifiers and "embedded" sentences see Bernarr Folta's *A Comparative Study of the Syntax in Speech and Writing of Grade One Students Using the Initial Teaching Alphabet and Students Using Traditional Orthography*, 1968, U.S.O.E. No. OEG-0-8-000145-0214-010, pages 14-16-17.

Figure 1: Outside and Embedded Modifiers

Outside Modifier: The boy left early *because he was tired.*



Embedded Modifier: *The tired* boy left early.



modifiers. I used an approach which demanded four behavioral responses from pupils: (1) Identifying which sentences in a set of sentences (or a paragraph) needs addition (2) Determining where in the sentence addition is possible (3) Listing several choices for addition (4) Selecting from the choices those which seem the most appropriate. With one class I began by projecting the following:

> It was midnight. I drifted down the river. I was alone and awfully scared. There was a rushing sound ahead. I grabbed for a rock and held on for a few seconds. Suddenly I lost my grip and slipped down.

Before raising any question about "addition," I complimented the pupil on the creation of suspense with the first sentence. I then asked: "Is there any one sentence in this paragraph which needs more words to tell *where, when, why, how, what color, how many,* or *for what reason?* Most of the class cited the second sentence. With the overhead, I projected the sentence and added the possible slots for pre-modifiers:

I drifted down the river.

I then addressed the class with the following: "Before we decide what to add, let's see *where* we can possibly add single words or phrases that will sharpen the focus on the word directly following the slot. As I point to each slot, tell me, in a choral response, where I can possibly place a modifier."

After responding in unison, the class concluded that pre-modifiers could be used in the following slots:

X I X drifted down the X river.

I then asked the class "Where do you think we should add modifiers?" They recommended the following slots and choices:

I X drifted down the X river.

*carelessly	*Nile
quietly	Mississippi
cautiously	*swollen
	flooded
	dangerous
	muddy

*Final Choices

The class's revised sentence read: *I carelessly drifted down the swollen Nile River.*

I used a very similar approach in trying to get the class to add to the post-modifying slots. The following is a brief summary of the questions and the responses.

Where can I add single words or phrases to sharpen the focus on the word preceding the slot?

I X drifted X down the river X .

Where do you feel we should add?

I drifted X down the river .

What choices can we list?

I drifted X down the river.

for a trip
in a boat
*on my home-made raft
without any power

With the addition of both pre-modifiers and post-modifiers, the final sentence read:

I carelessly drifted on my home-made raft down the swollen Nile River.

Other — less methodical — approaches might also be used to teach "addition." Getting pupils to add appositive phrases and adverbial phrases of time or place can be accomplished easily by visiting pupils in the class and privately asking questions about their writing.

CONCLUSION

In teaching pupils the three strategies for revision, I witnessed no miraculous changes in their writing habits; but I did see some good improvement in style. Also, I encountered no pupil resentment about having to re-write an assignment and no embarrassment about my discussing their writings in front of the class; but I did find the pupils enjoying the discovery approaches to language. I hope that their enjoyment with words and sentences leads them to more conscious and creative acts of ordering, selecting, and describing. I also hope that working on their own sentences has given them a heightened awareness, even an appreciation of sentences they encounter in their reading.

The teacher who finds something here worth borrowing should keep in mind that skills for revision cannot be taught in a vacuum. The content of the composition is, by all means, the most important concern of the writer and should not be slighted for stylistic effect. The aim of the assignment and the experience of the writer must also be taken into account.[9]

Finally, regarding the strategy of "addition," I do not mean to suggest, in any way, that the more words the writer has in a sentence, the better, more mature, his style will be. In fact, sentence expansion may sometimes clutter and create an artificial style, as Verna Newsome points out in "Expansions and Transformations to Improve Sentences," *English Journal*, May 1964. The teacher must carefully select sample sentences to illustrate "addition." Not any short sentence will do. Some sentences are very effective because they are short. They should be left that way.

Young pupils need to be guided in ways to develop creatively a written composition. Pupils' growth in language and composition should not be left merely to chance. The one person to set up the boundaries for discovery in writing is the elementary teacher who (1) has an understanding of the definite skills she wants her pupils to control, (2) carefully prepares her pupils to work the assignment, (3) offers plenty of encouragement and praise, and (4) helps her pupils to be open-minded about their own writing — to realize that sometimes revising their own work is part of the whole process of writing.

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[9]For different views on the reconciliation of *style* and *subject*, see Daniel Fogarty's *Roots for a New Rhetoric*, Columbia University, 1959, page 69; and Monroe Beardsley's "Style and Good Style," *Reflections on High School English*, University of Tulsa, 1966, pages 91-105.

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